

Americans for Democratic Action
1411 K street, N.W.
Suite 850
Washington, D.C. 20005

Adopted 1981

AN END TO ASSISTANCE TO THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT OF EL SALVADOR

The Reagan Administration has made its first major foreign policy choice in El Salvador. It has decided to increase aid and send military advisors to the government of El Salvador. It has made a bad choice.

Let us assume the worst possibilities as presented by the Reagan Administration. The Reagan Administration says that the guerrillas are receiving outside military assistance, particularly from Cuba. While allegations of outside support are true, the Reagan Administration has grossly overstated the case. The State Department's now famous White Paper, which has been largely discredited, served the Administration as the launching pad for its anti-Soviet policy and as justification for greatly increasing U.S. involvement in the Salvadoran war.

The State Department has been saying for months that if the left wins, a new government will probably execute hundreds, if not thousands, of its opponents if they do not flee the country first. It also says that such a government will be virulently anti-American. Both are distinct possibilities.

The Reagan Administration also says that it supports the agrarian and banking reforms. ADA believes the land reforms have been a limited, but mixed success. Peasants living for the entire year on large estates have benefitted by turning these estates into cooperatives. This reform, however, excluded seasonal workers despite the wishes of the peasant leader of the Salvadoran Land Reform Institute; he was subsequently assassinated on January 4th this year. "Land to the Tiller" will improve the economic situation of those peasants who could afford to rent land; but it also makes no provision for hundreds of thousands of families who are landless. Even worse is that, coincident with the reform efforts, the army has carried out a reign of terror against indigenous campesino leadership.

ADA, however, does not believe that these factors, singly or in combination, are enough to warrant continuing aid and sending military advisors to this government. The fundamental reality is this; the government is a military government, and has been for fifty years. The military once shared power with the oligarchy. It has been willing to support the reforms because the army no longer believes it needs the oligarchy and it needs to broaden its base of support. But, while it shared power with the oligarchy, it was not willing to share power with the poor majority.

To maintain its political dominance, the military has been willing to carry out, in its own right and through military-sanctioned death squads, the murder of thousands of people. Its unwillingness to truly share power and its massive killings in the service of that posture have led one civilian after another to leave the so-called civilian-military junta. The civilian side is now merely a shell. Its best minds and most dynamic leaders either have joined the opposition or are dead.

reign of terror against indigenous campesino leadership.

ADA, however, does not believe that these factors, singly or in combination, are enough to warrant continuing aid and sending military advisors to this government. The fundamental reality is this: the government is a military government, and has been for fifty years. The military once shared power with the oligarchy. It has been willing to support the reforms because the army no longer believes it needs the oligarchy and it needs to broaden its base of support. But, while it shared power with the oligarchy, it was not willing to share power with the poor majority.

To maintain its political dominance, the military has been willing to carry out, in its own right and through military-sanctioned death squads, the murder of thousands of people. Its unwillingness to truly share power and its massive killings in the service of that posture have led one civilian after another to leave the so-called civilian-military junta. The civilian side is now merely a shell. Its best minds and most dynamic leaders either have joined the opposition or are dead.

These civilians left the government for the same reason that ADA now calls upon the Administration to change its course: the recognition that the Salvadoran government, which is a military government, is not reformable. Those 15 to 20 officers, who took part in the coup and were truly committed both to reducing the oligarchy's stranglehold over the economy and to sharing power, are now no longer in positions of authority. The officers now in leadership position will fight hard to defend their vision of a "reformed" El Salvador from the "communist threat" because as such it promises them even greater opportunity for personal enrichment. The best known progressive officer, Colonel Majano, is now in New York.

In sum, the army of El Salvador is a corrupt institution which is unwilling to share power with any new force. To date, its repression has been somewhat successful. Salvadorans have been alienated by the divisions among and some of the tactics of the left. Nonetheless, it is clear that the people of El Salvador will not long tolerate a government held together by corruption and held in power by terror. Current U.S. policies must inevitably lead to increasing direct U.S. involvement on behalf of a government despised by its people. We have been down this path before and we should now avoid it. We do not need a second Vietnam.

ADA urgently calls for negotiations. At this point only the government of El Salvador and the Reagan Administration are hindering efforts by Germany, Mexico, Venezuela, the OAS and the Social Democratic International to bring all parties to the negotiating table. A negotiated solution is possible and is the only solution to the present military stalemate. ADA affirms its belief that a negotiated solution is the only way to strengthen the hands of those Salvadorans committed to democracy and, in the long run, to guarantee U.S. interests.

#